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DECEMBER 19 1978

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for your letter of November 28 in which you requested information about the United States response to the Guyana tragedy. As you know, some of the questions in your letter raise issues that require careful answers and we are continuing to address these matters urgently in conjunction with the various interested agencies. Meanwhile, I understand that your office is receiving considerable correspondence regarding the Jonestown affair for which the following information may be useful in preparing responses, while we work on more precise answers to some of your questions.

On Sunday, November 19, it had become clear that the United States Government was facing a major crisis in Guyana. An American Congressman and other Americans in his party had been killed. A settlement believed to include over 1,000 Americans was involved, and its situation was uncertain. It was apparent that the Government of Guyana required assistance in handling a major emergency created by the presence of Americans within its borders.

The President, acting under his constitutional authority as Chief Executive and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, ordered the departments of our government to take action to deal with this emergency. The operational decisions within the United States Government in this unique situation were made by the Secretary of State in conjunction with some of his Cabinet colleagues.

The Honorable
Clement J. Zablocki, Chairman
Committee on International Relations,
House of Representatives.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR

REVIEWED BY _____ DATE _____

Under the President's Executive authorities, medical evacuation for injured Americans was immediately ordered, and the United States Government offered assistance to the Government of Guyana to prevent further loss of life. As events progressed, it became clear that there were large numbers of Americans dead. For a time, it was believed that there were survivors in the jungle, and the United States adjusted and increased its assistance to help the search by Guyana police and military. Finally, when the full scope of the tragedy of Jonestown was clear, our Government was requested by the Government of Guyana to remove the bodies. This operation was considered essential in handling the emergency situation which existed in Guyana at the time.

The Justice Department is fully exploring possible legal remedies which can be used to recover the cost the United States Government has incurred in removing and processing the bodies of Americans from Guyana. Now that the emergency is substantially over, the Office of Management and Budget and other agencies are reviewing the various operations to determine the exact cost to the United States Government. Although the costs to the United States Government of an effort of this magnitude obviously are considerable, they are substantially less than the $8 million figure used in some press reports. Please be assured that we will report fully to you as Chairman of the International Relations Committee on these aspects of the operation upon completion of our review. Meanwhile, the Justice Department will make all efforts to recover the costs to the United States Government.

Some survivors were able to pay for their return trip to the United States. Those without funds were given a repatriation loan, normal in such circumstances, against a signed undertaking to repay the United States Government.

If you have any further questions, you may wish to contact Deputy Assistant Secretary John Bushnell in our Bureau of Inter-American Affairs. His telephone is 632-8562.

Sincerely,

/S/

Douglas J. Bennet, Jr.
Assistant Secretary
for Congressional Relations

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